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ABSTRACT

The trend toward alternative programs and schools results from a broader understanding by educators of the need to tailor schools to the interests and needs of young people; and to the fact that students, parents, and citizens are demanding more relevant programs in a time of constant change. Many districts are striving for a comprehensive high school organization that could be considered an intermediate step to more dramatic departures in providing relevant learning experiences. Some of the more visible models or attempts at alternative school programing include comprehensive high schools, mini-schools, school-community based programs, schools-without-walls, open schools, and special interest and/or special problem schools. (Author)

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SPEAKER: Elbert D. Brooks, Superintendent, Metropolitan School Dist. Tenn.

TOPIC: ALTERNATIVES TO THE TRADITIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

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For the past quarter of a century, educational administrators, teachers and citizens have been aware of the fact that the traditional high school with its primary thrust on preparing young people for college has not provided for the needs of at least fifty per cent of the young people who enter high school. Few educators and lay citizens, however, are committed to a realistic effort to provide the educational experiences needed for all of our young people. There are many reasons for this apathy and negligence, but two reasons which may be cited are reluctance to upset the status quo and real concern about the cost of implementing programs required for relevant education. Franklin Keller, more than twenty years ago called for an understanding of the needs of all students and commitment to do something about these needs. Dr. James B. Conant, in The American High School Today, and later in The Comprehensive High School, probably had more impact on both lay and professional citizenry than any other person over the past fifty years. It does appear strange, however, that we have had such great difficulty in translating the original seven cardinal principles of education into practice.

Let me explore with you a few alternatives to the traditional education pattern. I'll define an alternative to the traditional school program as a school or program-or in some instances, a program within program with the philosophical orientation and thrust which provides relevant programs for students and provides students and parents with educational choices. A choice might be one of selecting elective courses to supplement State or local school board graduation requirements, a choice allowed in most high school programs. However this choice is usually an elective course supplemental to a college preparatory or a general education program. With the move toward vocational and technical schools, and toward large comprehensive schools, the opportunity for choice or selection of programs by the student takes on much broader scope. Here again, the student takes certain required courses, but has the opportunity for alternative programs tailored to his special interests and possible future vocation. A large modern comprehensive high school today provides substantial choice and opportunity for the varying experiences needed by the majority of our young people attending high school.

The movement toward comprehensive high school programming was an effort to develop alternatives to the college preparatory program. The trend toward alternative programs and schools results from a broader understanding by educators of the need to tailor schools to interests and needs of young people, and to the fact that students, parents and citizens at large are demanding more relevant programs in a time of constant change. The fact that we

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delayed our commitment to comprehensive programs contributes to current thrusts toward models that have little resemblance to the traditional high school. Our early concept of alternative schools and programs was one in which the student and parent had a choice of subjects and programs which we determined they needed. We now find the concept of "alternative" encompasses the idea that "choice" provides students and parents a role in planning and implementing the entire educational process.

## ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL MODELS

I'm sure you've heard the comment that about the only two institutions in the country that do not allow for personal choice are public schools and the internal revenue service. Fifty years ago, a youngster had the alternative of quitting school and going to work. This was an acceptable choice, and was the person's own practical way to get on-th-job training. But, today a young person has to show an I.D. card and high school diploma in order to meet the first criterion set up for job application. Are we expecting too much then for public schools to develop options for those who want and can profit from work experience while continuing their education?

What are some of the more visable attempts in alternative school programming? Many districts, of course, are still striving for a comprehensive high school organization which might be considered an intermediate step to more dramatic departures to provide relevant learning experiences for our high school students. Most programming or models can be classified in the following categories:

(1) Comprehensive High Schools
(2) Mini-Schools
(3) School-Community Based Programs
(4) Schools-Without-Walls
(5) Open Schools
(6) Special Interest and/or special Problems Schools

COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOLS:
Dr. Conant established three objectives for the comprehensive high school namely
(1) To provide a general education for all of the future citizens
(2) To provide good elective programs for those who wish to use their acquired skills immediately upon graduation, and
(3) To provide satisfactory programs for those whose vocations will depend upon their subsequent education.

These objectives have been modified and supplemented in every community that has developed good comprehensive high school programs. In my own district, our comprehensive school program includes the following goals:
(1) To provide curriculum programs for students of differing career patterns.
(2) To give increased emphasis to career development for all students.
(3) To make programs relevant to students of varying achievement and socio-economic backgrounds.
(4) To emphasize opportunities for specialization and in-depth study within all areas of the curriculum.
(5) To provide a personalized approach for students through guidance, administrative, extra-curricular and student-centered programs.
(6) To provide civic, service, work and other life experiences for all students.
(7) To organize community school programs serving the total community as well as the student population.

At our McGavock Comprehensive High School serving 2700 students, grades 10-12, approximately two-thirds of the students are enrolled in advanced and specialized

courses not offered in most other high schools in our district. About 60% are enrolled in 20 technical and vocational programs in a school where 70% plan to attend college. The Performing Arts program draws hundreds of students and over 200 students are doing volunteer work in social agencies such as hospitals, clinics, prisons, government offices and other schools as part of their sociology and psychology programs. The student average at McGavock for 2700 enrolled is three periods per day of advanced, specialized or non-college programming. A student constructed and operated radio station has 25 students getting their FCC license in the process.

Curriculum flexibility is also stressed within a given subject matter sequence. For instance in language arts and social studies, a student may choose a different mini-course from a selected list of twenty-seven each six-weeks period. A post-holing approach in American History allows a student a choice of exploring a few areas or concepts in depth. This school program goes far beyond any other school, public or private, in our city and in the State of Tennessee in providing excellence in learning opportunities in academics, in fine arts and in technical and vocational training

Skyline Comprehensive High School in Dallas, Texas, is another example of multi programming for the interests and needs of heterogeneous student populations.

MINI*SCHOOLS

Dr. James B. Conant urged development of large comprehensive high schools in order to serve the needs of all students. He also suggested that small inefficient secondary schools, most of whom are academically oriented, should be closed out if they served fewer than 400 students. His position was that a small school could not offer the range of courses provided in a larger school. As large schools were developed, many of them on the same organizational pattern as the smaller high schools, arguments were presented that while schools could be too small, they can also be too large. Harold Howe suggested in High Schools for 1980, that large schools should be subdivided into small units for administrative and counseling purposes. The school-within-a-school concept is operating in several urban areas, for example, Newton High School in Newton, Massachusetts, has seven "houses" each with about 400 students who form a cross section of the total school population and each has about 30 teachers and one administrator. The new McGavock Comprehensive High School in Nashville, Tennessee, Serves 2700 students. It is divided into four schools of about 650 students each with a small school principal and two counselors. Administration, guidance functions, registration, attendance and some student activities are carried on within the small school structure. All students, however, can avail themselves of the total offerings of the large school. Evanston Township High School, Evanston, Illinois, is subdivided into four semi-independent schools, each with its own identity and with a student population of 1200. Many secondary educators feel that an administrative group of over six hundred is still too large for a student to have maximized experiences and for good interaction with faculty members and other students. Some suggest that within each of these subdivisions, students be further grouped into units of from 25 to 30 with the opportunity of meeting regularly for special purposes with sufficient time scheduled for meaningful interaction between and among the students on issues of interest and consequence to the students. If schools can be organized and administered in such a manner that students do not lose their identity and have an opportunity for effective interpersonal experineces, then certainly the large comprehensive school with its many alternative programs and opportunity for specialized learning in greater depth must be given our full vote of confidence.

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SCHOOL-COMMUNITY BASED PROGRAMS:

The Comprehensive School provides options that open doors, but may still confine students within four walls, shielded from the community. Some of you, as we in Nashville, meet this challenge by bringing citizen volunteers and resou people into the building to assist with the regular school program, or we reach out and send students into the community for educational experience for part or all of the day. The very successful cooperative work-experience programs combine formal classwork with practical experience in business and industry. Normally in this program, a student spends about one-half of his senior year in the community. Other districts build upon this limited model to encourag all youngsters to have at least one year of work experience outside the school building. This may take the form of service to the community where a youngster contracts to work, through Junior Red Cross in hospitals and nursing homes; or contracts for experience credit in the community's performing arts program, or contracts for in-house service credit, where a high school student is assigne to the elementary or junior high school as a teacher-aide for part of the school day. We currently have more than 800 students receiving high school credit for approved service in Junior Red Cross and Junior Achievement projects. Next year we will give high school credit for performing arts and teacher aide activities approved by the Board of Education. Atlanta Public Schools give credit for community-based education to students who negotiate a performance contract through the schools' Central Learning Center and approved community agencies. Although these school-co mmunity activities stress social and civic experience rather than pure academics, certainly in t is day and age when the 18 year old is granted voting privileges, and can marry and begin a family at an earlier age, our school system should provide a systematic transition from carefully supervised classroom activities to meaningful living experiences within the community which require little or no supervision.

SCHOOLS WITHOUT WALLS:

There are a few among us who believe that within ten years high school may not be a place but instead will be identified as a growth period during which students are not restricted to a specific high school as we know high schools today, but who instead will have a "home base" for counseling and tutoring with the major part of the day spent at work and study in City Hall, businesses, hospitals, museums, etc. Perhaps the best known models of schools-without-walls are the Parkway program developed in Philadelphia, and Metro School Program in Chicago. Although we know that Parkway has not been free from criticism and questions have been raised about its effectiveness, if we evaluate the outcomes in terms of what goes on within the four walls of a traditional school we do hear, however, that the program is enjoying some success, that is expanding, and per capita costs are less than for the more traditionally organized high school. Both Parkway's appeal to students and the focal point of criticism from outside the school can be directed toward its basic characteristics of freedom of students from limits of one building and the concept of educational experiences coming from institutions and activities outside the school. Students are actively involved in determining the kinds of exper ineces they will have, the organization of their educational program and the nature of relationships they will have with teachers, counselors and resource people in the community.

OPEN SCHOOLS

The concept of open schools, or as they are called in some areas, "free schools," can be found more frequently among the private sector of education. The New School Directory estimates that we have approximately 500 free schools

operating with a few of these enrolling more than 200 students but most of them enrolling less than 50. Most of these schools are started by citizens who for one reason or another may be alienated or disenchanted with public schools and who feel that it is impossible to get genuine alternative programs within the public school system. To them the free school means much more than student freedom. Although the open school may be centered in one building, the program focuses primarily on individualized study and self-direction with strong parental involvement in planning and implementing the school program. The St. Paul, Minnesota public school system is successfully operating a K-12 Open School for 500 pupils with a waiting list of eager candidates. The Brown School in Louisville, Kentucky, and John Dewey School in Brooklyn, New York, are among other "Open Schools" receiving considerable attention from educators.

Special Problem Schools:

Perhaps more progress has been made in public school alternative programming for youngsters with unusual special interests and special problems.

School dropouts are an identified problem in most school districts. Local effort, but more frequently federal funds from such programs as ESEA and Model Cities are responsible for the school-away-from-school in downtown "Store fronts." Most successful schools for dropouts have programs which recognize that dropouts have more than academic problems. Programs are based on low teacher class loads and more individual guidance and counseling. Work experience is an integral part of most successful programs, where work experience provides pay for those involved in training. Most urban areas provide special schools for pregnant girls. The current trend however, is to allow a pregnant girl to remain in her regular school program with supplementary services provided for a short time during actual confinement and period of recuperation. Many schools have developed special programs or special schools for disruptive and emotionally disturbed students. Most programs focus on rehabilitation and try to develop or maintain interest in school and basic skills to enable the student to return to his home school. Student rehabilitation, curricular change and modification of staff attitude and behavior are program goals. Most of us will agree that schools and special programs for "disruptive" and delinquent youngsters are among the easiest to sell to taxpayers and school boards. Teachers and principals also come front and center to tell us that something must be done about the two to four per cent of youngsters who are disruptive to the point that normal classroom activity cannot be carried out.

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